



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Highlights of Symington Sub-Committee Session  
on Thailand - Friday, November 14, 1969

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SENATORS PRESENT: Symington, Cooper, Aiken

SUMMARY: This session, with Ambassador Martin as the witness, was the most friendly yet. Amb. Martin deftly handled the matter, and the record will show the value of the way things were handled in Thailand, particularly as compared to the courses of action pursued in Viet-Nam.

END SUMMARY.

Counsel sought to relate U.S. buildup to the Tonkin Gulf, but Martin said that it was the result of gradual decisions in Washington. He stressed the continuing dialogue between Thailand and the U.S. and refused to relate U.S. requests for bases or Thai concerns to any one particular event.

He explained his recommendation for joint planning in terms of the desire not to repeat the 1962 dispatch of a large U.S. element to Thailand when in '64 the same sort of threat arose. Therefore, a planned exercise to organize a more orderly response was turned to. Noting that the Thai would think our deployments made them more exposed to communist attack, Martin denied any Thai requests as the result of that concern or that there was any direct relationship between the level of U.S. aid and our increasing base rights.

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Symington, again repeating that the contingency plan had been eliminated as an important issue, said he was trying to find out the extent of our relationship with and commitment to Thailand, which had grown like Topsy. Would the increase in personnel and expenses in Thailand lead to the same pattern as in Viet-Nam?

Counsel put the July 21 letter on Taksin from Secretary Rogers to Fulbright in the record and probed as to its background. When Martin demurred, Symington asked how the plan evolved and noted that it had been signed by a U.S. General and the Prime Minister. Martin noted that it had not been signed in the Ministerial capacity on the Thai side. Symington said Thailand could claim that it had been so signed, and there was danger that this pattern could be followed in other places. Martin then gave Counsel the history of why MACTHAI became a separate command. Symington referred to the possibility that Sarit's fortune was based on graft and then asked if there has been any improper economic or military relationships by U.S. people in Thailand. Martin said, "no", and also denied any political activities that Martin did not control between the Thai Government and U.S. military or civilian elements.

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Counsel tried to make a point by reference to "in the context of bilateral military planning" in the note establishing MACTHAI, but Martin pointed out this, referred to the use of facilities in Thailand. Referring to Thanom's press conference statement, Counsel asked if the Thais thought contingency planning was an assurance. Martin said that the orderly process tends to confirm the validity of the commitment, but had never been thought of by the Thai as extending it. Counsel asked if the plan placed a limitation on the options open to the President. Martin said whether there is danger depends on the degree of supervision in the Executive Branch.

Martin, in response to Symington, said we would be obliged to support Thailand against communist aggression, but stressed that we were not obliged to follow any specific course of action. He noted that we were not committed under SEATO to defend against internal problems. Symington noted that the Thais could think that we would surely come to their defense.

Counsel again tried to relate U.S. aid rates to the increased military presence. Martin rather related the increased MAP to the U.S. desire to keep Thailand's ratio of expenses for development and for defense in the sort of proportion that SFRC had always favored.

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Symington noted that we had put in a billion dollars; and asked whether if we got out of SEA in an orderly way, Thailand could remain independent. Martin said if there was neither overt aggression nor internal subversion which was massively supported from without, the Thai could remain independent, even against NVN, if the U.S. gave equipment support.

Martin regretted that the bases had been developed only for Viet-Nam and not with a view to the requirements of the '70s. Symington pressed as to why we had no arrangement for repayment to the U.S. of residual value of the bases upon U.S. departure. Martin stressed the relationship of common interests, the Thai desire not to be occupied by the U.S., and the fact that any agreement would have committed us further to courses of action which should have been avoided. Since the bases were only for the Viet-Nam war, we did not try to make an agreement. Although they would not admit we were there for some time, the U.S. people were informed through the press, as was the Congress, of what we were doing.

Martin said the Thai do not consider the bases a guarantee in addition to the treaty, but rely on the treaty, and said that whether our presence constitutes a moral commitment is a matter of subjective judgment. He told of the use of

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helicopters to ferry Thai troops to deal with the CI problem in the Northeast, and noted that they were enjoined from combat or from shooting back. They were withdrawn promptly so that the Thai could take on the job themselves. Asked if the military had interfered with State Department roles, Martin said he considered the military as experts. He welcomed firm advocacy, but then had seen that decisions were taken. He explained any hiatus in getting Thai troops to Viet-Nam to the need for training.

He rejected the reference of a quid pro quo for that Thai unit. He said he would be surprised if the Thai had not been aware of what the Korean troops in Viet-Nam were paid.

After some requests for data for the record on various aspects, including the ETO contract, Counsel probed as to whether the SEATO Treaty was a good idea. Martin took advantage of this to stress that the Treaty did not have to be implemented as it had been in Viet-Nam, but the obligations thereof could be carried out without Americanization of the effort. This had been proved in Thailand. Asked why the Thai sent troops to Viet-Nam, he said it was because the U.S. had asked. They thought the U.S. would be uncomfortable alone; even though not having any firm

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conviction that the troops were all that important or  
that the U.S. massive intervention was the right answer  
for the Viet-Nam problem.

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